



## **Berlin Conference – 1884**

### **CSS Model United Nations**



## Overview

Since the time of the ancient Greeks, Europe and Africa have been highly intertwined. Hellenic states traded with Egypt, independent and then Persian-ruled, before conquering the area in 332. Alexander's namesake city of Alexandria remained the capital of the Roman province of *Ægyptus* for over a thousand years. In fact, the name "Africa" itself comes from the word *Afri*, a term used to describe the realm of the Carthaginians of what is now Tunisia. Abyssinia, also known as Ethiopia, maintained a position of power in the Horn of Africa as an Oriental Orthodox Christian nation-state that was an ally to early Christians.

Yet Africa itself seemed impenetrable, save the north coast, to exploration or conquest. After the fall of the Roman and Byzantine empires, few Europeans ever dared venture south of Tangier, Algiers, or Tripoli to the vast deserts of the Sahara. Until the Age of Sail, there was essentially no knowledge in Europe of any of the vast continent that lay to the south. Even after Portuguese caravels began traversing Africa's coasts in search of trade, the interior of the continent was inscrutable to foreign eyes due to a combination of deadly diseases, hostile natives, and ignorance of geography.

It is important to recognise that the native states of sub-Saharan Africa were not primitive, anarchic entities lacking civilisation as was asserted by the European powers. The great empires of the Niger River, including Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, were powerful inland trading states, while coastal states like Zanzibar established dynamic trade connections with Arabia, India, and even Indonesia. The tribal nations of the Niger delta controlled valuable oil resources that were highly desirable to the Great Powers

The Napoleonic Wars completely revolutionised the European political theatre. The conquering French ensured that the traditional centre of European power and influence in Vienna no longer dominated continental affairs; instead, the Great Powers began a game of tug-of-war of power and influence that would last for the next century and a half. By the time of the late 1800s, the ambitions of the European empires seemed unquenchable.

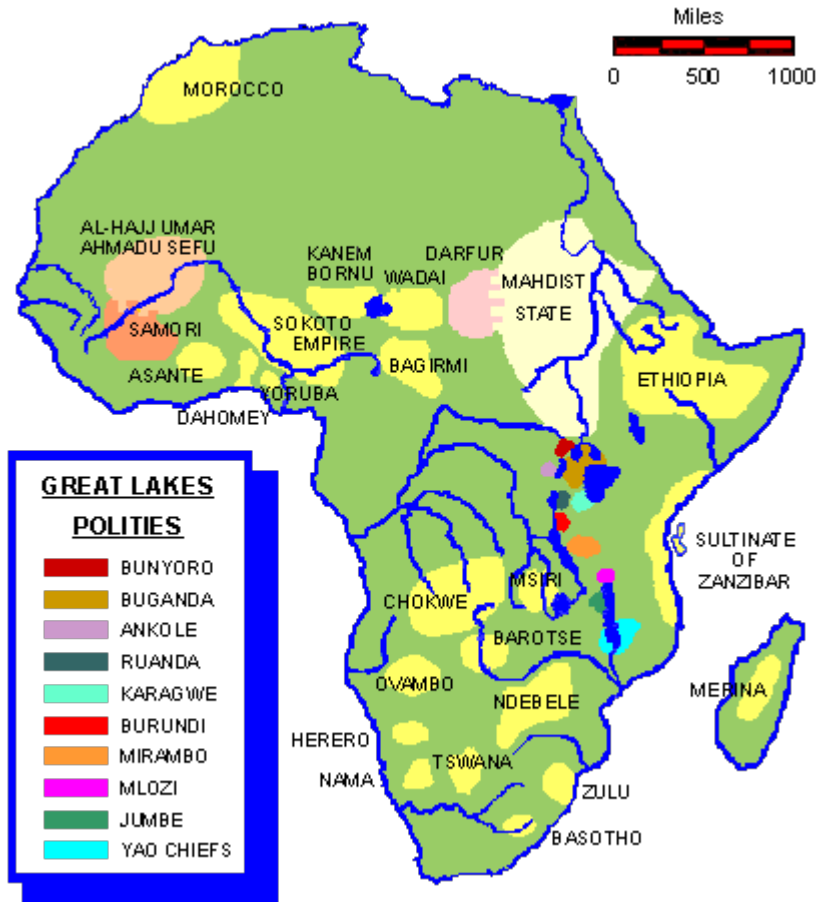
European powers had maintained trading posts, often no larger than the area around a single fort, along the coast of Africa for decades. The Portuguese and British, great trading empires in their own right, established significant and often peaceful relationships with native Africans. In fact, the Portuguese were highly impressed by the Kongo people of what is now Angola, marvelling that a non-Christian state could have developed agriculture, systems of water transport, and an organised bureaucracy. Lesser powers, such as Denmark, Sweden, Brandenburg and even Poland-Lithuania (under the auspices of the autonomous duchy of Courland) also established trading posts at one point or another, while others (Russia, Austria-Hungary, and the Netherlands) tried unsuccessfully. Many of these trading stations were along the coast of West Africa. Ironically, the empire that would go on to conquer most of the region, France, seemed to have the least interest in trading stations, instead focusing on fighting British influence in Asia. Before the 1870s, the only significant European holdings in Africa were the British lands of the Cape Colony in what is now South Africa and the French occupation of Algiers.

The unifications of Germany and Italy completely changed the attitude of European powers towards Africa. With two new, powerful European states competing for prestige and influence in Europe and around the world, Africa suddenly was *terra nullius*, land

waiting to be conquered in the name of national pride. Portugal reacted quickest, moving inward from the coasts of Angola and Mozambique to conquer the Kongo and other native states. Britain, formerly content in its forts at the Niger River delta and in the hills of South Africa, now moved to annex the remainder of Nigeria and East Africa. France, still stunned by its loss in the Franco-Prussian war of 1871, rapidly conquered much of the Sahara from its northern Algerian territories and new possessions in Benin and Senegal. In response to the French jump to action, Germany expanded its possessions in Kamerun (Cameroon) and Tanganyika. Finally, Italy and Spain, late in development and trying to prove themselves as great powers, tried to establish spheres of influence of their own, in Libya and Morocco, respectively.

Portugal, concerned by British and German moves into what it considered sovereign territory, called for a conference of the European powers to assign legal spheres of influence in order to prevent the outbreak of war among the great empires. Otto von Bismarck, bemused by the fascination of Europe with empire, nevertheless agreed, and offered to host said conference in Berlin in 1884. He made a point of inviting every European power and the United States (who in reality declined to attend) in order to portray himself as an “honest broker” that Europe could trust to distribute power fairly.

It is important to note that not every European dispute over African spheres of influence was solved at the Berlin Conference. Morocco, for example remained a sore geopolitical issue between France and Germany until the First World War. Tripolitania, also known as Libya, was not conquered by the Italians until just before the war, as were Eritrea and Somalia.



### Region Analysis: North Africa

The countries of North Africa, including Morocco, Algiers, Tunisia, Tripolitania, and Egypt, all had various degrees of interaction with Europe. Morocco, perhaps the most independent of these states, was a peaceful power that maintained good relations with most of Europe, and was the first country to recognise the young United States of America. Algiers was always a bit of a pawn, sometimes in the hands of the Moroccans, sometimes independent but a puppet of the Ottoman Empire. Tunisia and Tripolitania, despite being theoretically part of the Ottoman Empire since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, enjoyed high degrees of autonomy as “Barbary States”, funding pirates and disturbing trade throughout the Mediterranean.

What was then Tripolitania is now known as Libya, and the Italian regime considered it a rightful part of *La Magna Italia*. However, at the time of the Berlin Conference, the territory was still Ottoman; war between Italy and the Turks did not come until 1911. A savvy Italian diplomat might be able to negotiate the transfer of Tripolitania without war, however.

France had interest in establishing a protectorate over Morocco and Tunisia as early as the 1850s. In regard to Morocco, France was challenged in its declaration of sovereignty by the British, Germans, and Spanish, each of whom had varying levels of interest in establishing a similar protectorate. The conflict between the empires led to two Moroccan Crises in 1905 and 1911, even after the Berlin Conference. The Spanish and French eventually reached a compromise, with northern Morocco and the territory south of Sida Ifni ceded to the Spaniards and the French protectorate encompassing the remainder. Tunisia, considered a prime target for colonisation by Italy, was rather unfortunately for them sphered and forced into a protectorate by France in 1881 before the first Italian efforts even began. Still, however, Tunisia remained a diplomatic stumbling block between Italy and France until the First World War.

Egypt, however, was far and away the most important region of North Africa, especially to the European powers. As the home of the Nile River, and thus the gateway to the Sudan and East Africa, the Khedivate fuelled tension as early as the Napoleonic Wars, when Napoleon tried to add it to the French imperium. For centuries, Egypt had been under the Ottoman yoke as a fully integrated part (a vilayet) of the Sublime Porte. However, in 1867, the Mamluks of Egypt under Muhammad Ali rose up, winning autonomy (but not

independence) for the newly-formed Khedivate of Egypt. This period of pseudo-independence did not last long, however. The British, eager to protect the Suez Canal, their lifeline to India, occupied the entire country in 1883. Thus, at the time of the Berlin Conference, Egypt was an autonomous country within the Ottoman Empire that was (mostly) peacefully occupied by forces of the British Empire. Although Egypt and Morocco were not in reality invited to the Berlin Conference, they will appear in council to add a (nonvoting) voice to the debate over colonialism.

### **Region Analysis: East Africa and the Sudan**

The British pseudo-claim on Egypt provided yet more encouragement to Cecil Rhodes and the imperialistic faction of the British Parliament, who wanted to control the entirety of the Nile River. This meant establishing a colony in the Sudan. France, however, wanted to connect its Saharan possessions in the west with its trading post of Djibouti on the Horn of Africa, which required part of the Sudan and parts of both sides of the Nile. This was intolerable to the British, who saw France's attempt at grandiose empire as a feeble compensation for the losses it suffered in the Franco-Prussian War. Rising tensions and a refusal to negotiate diplomatically led to the so-called Fashoda Crisis of 1891, in which British and French troops stared each other down on either side of the line of control. The resolution of this conflict in favour of the British, however, was the last major disagreement between Britain and France, leading to the period of alliance between the two former blood enemies known as the *Entente Cordiale*.

Italy, too, had interest in East Africa, especially in Abyssinia (Ethiopia). However, the young nation did not have the resources until long after the Berlin Conference to set up

settlements there. Instead, the Islamic states of Majerteen and Hobyo continued to exist in the shadow of Eastern Orthodox Abyssinia until colonization by the Italians in 1889. The

### **Region Analysis: West Africa**

In order to properly understand the impact of the Berlin Conference on the precolonial states of the West African coast, one must recognise the hundreds of years of interaction these states, in stark contrast to the inland kingdoms, had with the European empires. Since ancient times, traders from the Mediterranean Sea had engaged in diplomacy and peaceful exchange with the kingdoms that grew in the forests of the coasts, usually treating them as equals. With the advent of the slave trade, however, these states, most of whose records have been lost to history following the holocaust that was the Transatlantic Slave Trade, ceased to be sources of peaceful trade and instead became sources of human labour. The nations of the New World were built on the backs of West Africans and their offspring.

The Berlin Conference came at a time when nearly every European power held forts and small slices of territory along the West African coastline. Despite the many territorial holdings, few empires were interested in expanding inland. The ones that were, France, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Germany, did so in violation of international law before the conference even occurred. Even so, these empires will want to validate their claims to these West African holdings with the other European powers and each other, especially Germany, France, and the UK.

### **Region Analysis: Central Africa and the Congo**



Central Africa presents one of the more complicated cases at the time of the Berlin Conference. All the great imperial powers have interest in the massive natural resources of the rainforests of the mighty Congo River. This rivalry, feared by many as a potential *casus belli* for a new Great War, is one of the major causes for the Berlin Conference. Belgium's King Leopold set up a protectorate over the region under the auspices of the International Congo Society, now recognised as largely a front for illegal and exploitative forced labour operations on the left bank of the Congo. Belgium's king hopes that the Berlin negotiations will yield a guarantee for both the free and unregulated status of its *de facto*-held territory and the sovereignty of the ICS over the region.

Other empires also claim large swaths of Central Africa. The French hold much of the right bank of the western Congo River and have interest in expanding into the northern forests of what they call Gabon as far as the Spanish territory of Rio Muni and along the full length of the riverbank, even onward to the Sudan. German settlers and traders have long held interest in Kamerun (Cameroon), but Germany has a much higher population in the area and would like to move northwards to Lake Chad. The UK, heavily interested in its dream of "Cape to Cairo" empire, looks to assert sovereignty over land from the borders of Sudan and Ethiopia as far south as Lake Malawi. Finally, the German Empire asserts its control over the large territory of Tanganyika, from its namesake lake to the Indian Ocean.

### **Region Analysis: Southern Africa**

South Africa is one of Africa's oldest colonies. After the Napoleonic Wars confirmed British sovereignty over the eclectic mix of Dutch settlers, English farmers, and Zulu warriors that was South Africa, the British forced all the Dutch onto the territory of the

Orange Free State, which will not participate in the debate over colonialism. The lands to the north, colloquially known as “Rhodesia” after the prominent Cecil Rhodes, form an integral part of both British and Portuguese interest. Germany, meanwhile, wants to colonise the extravagantly worthless territory of South-West Afrika, despite Bismarck’s opposition. South Africa should change the least as a result of the Berlin Conference, but it is still an important area nevertheless.

### **Country Analysis: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland**

Britain has enjoyed much of the past century as the world’s undisputed superpower. The Royal Navy rules the waves, the Empire stretches from the icy northern islands of Canada to the deserts of the Australian Outback. Now imperialists cry for British rule “from the Cape to Cairo”, an African empire that the UK certainly has the capability to establish. Britain should use the Conference to assert sovereignty over inland regions of their West African territories, in addition to ensuring that no Germans, Italians, or French attempt to challenge the growing number of English-speaking settlers in East Africa (Kenya and Uganda). If possible, the British will try to establish a protectorate over Morocco; however, as the empire with the weakest claim to that country, the likelihood of success is low. In addition, the British deny their long-time ally, Portugal, dominion over the Rhodesian and Malawian regions to connect Angola and Mozambique. A sphere of influence in Egypt and the Sudan is of the highest priority, especially if challenged by the French.

### **Country Analysis: French Third Republic**

France is the world’s second-most powerful empire, despite its loss to the Prussians in 1871. Now that a hostile, united Germany occupies Alsace-Lorraine, France must extend

its sphere of influence elsewhere to compete with the German menace. Dominion over Algeria and Tunisia, already established, is a necessity for affirmation by the Conference. In addition, the vast deserts of the Sahara lie open to French influence; motion northward from Benin, Guinea, and Senegal may yield profitable results. France already controls Madagascar, but the Germans or even Austrians might move to extend their power there. Djibouti, proud French outpost on the Indian Ocean, could be connected through the Sudan by a talented representative. The Spanish could be France's best friends or worst enemies, depending on the situation in Morocco.

### **Country Analysis: German Empire**

Bismarck's unification of Germany in the palace of Versailles came at the close of the Franco-Prussian war, in which Germany seized the highly disputed territory of Alsace-Lorraine (Elsass-Lothringen in German). In what seemed a blink of an eye, a strong and united German Empire seemed poised to completely redefine European power. Despite Bismarck's scepticism of colonial endeavours, others within the new empire, including the emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm I, believed that colonisation of "lesser civilisations" was a way to spread German culture and compete with Britain and France. Germany at this time views the United Kingdom as a potential ally, along with Austria-Hungary and Italy. Top goals for Germany at the Berlin Conference are to affirm a sphere of influence of Kamerun, Tanganyika, and Togoland, where it already has sent settlers. Despite Bismarck's objections that taking South-West Africa is a worthless prestige grab, Wilhelm wants the Berlin Conference to grant that region to Germany. Elsass-Lothringen (Alsace-Lorraine) remains a stumbling block in relations with France.

**Country Analysis: Kingdom of Italy**

Italy's unification came as a surprise to most of the European powers. France, in particular, was caught off guard when a powerful and unified Italy appeared less than 100km from Marseille. Italy's ambitions may outshine its capacity; although it claims Tunisia and Tripolitania as spheres of influence, it currently barely has the military capacity to enforce order within its own realm, much less the South Mediterranean. Italy would like to someday fly the tricolour over Somalia, Somaliland, and Ethiopia, but lacks the capacity to push claims on any. Nevertheless, due to the relative economic worthlessness of the region, the other powers may approve Italian ambitions there if a skilled diplomat succeeds in Berlin.

**Country Analysis: Kingdom of Portugal and the Algarve**

Portugal, despite a centuries-long decline in prestige and military capability, still maintains perhaps the most organised and efficient African empire. Owning territory on both coasts of southern Africa in Angola and Mozambique, Portugal's main focus is still trade. However, it is Portugal's goal to create a great African empire from east coast to west coast. This proposal, called the Carta Rosada, or Pink Map, is directly at odds with the ambitions of Portugal's oldest ally, Britain. Nevertheless, it should be considered Lisbon's top priority.

**Country Analysis: Kingdom of Belgium**

Belgium's situation in the Conference is a unique one. Lacking in size, population, and influence, the small bilingual buffer state has little hope of acquiring spheres of

influence based on power projection. Instead, Belgium's top priority is to ensure that the entirety of the massive Congo region is designated as a "free trade zone" under the auspices of the International Congo Society, headed by Belgium's King Leopold I. Under this arrangement, the resource-rich jungles of the Congo basin would not technically be a Belgian colony but a zone outside of standard national law, thus making it convenient for the European powers to exploit its resources.

### **Country Analysis: Kingdom of Spain**

Spain's glory days of empire are long behind her, and newer, more modern states have risen in her stead. Nevertheless, Spain craves territory in Africa; a conquest that in Madrid's eyes will lead to restored glory and prestige. The main area of interest is northwestern Africa across the Strait of Gibraltar. Spain already controls two major cities on the north coast, Ceuta and Melilla, and would like nothing more than to establish a protectorate over all Morocco. A Spanish settlement in Ifni has existed for some time now and would inevitably continue as such, while the southerly, mostly uninhabited province of Rio de Oro could be an easy acquisition given its relative unimportance in the eyes of the other European powers. Finally, Spain still controls a pair of territories in Central Africa: the island of Fernando Po (and associated Annobón) and Río Muni on the coast. The interests of much more powerful empires surround these miniscule possessions, however, so expansion here is highly unlikely.

### **Country Analysis: Ottoman Empire**

The Sublime Porte at this time is rapidly becoming known as the "sick man" of Europe. Despite having recently won the Crimean War against Russia, the Ottomans lack a

strong military or modern economic system. In fact, they would have been crushed in 1853 if not for the British, French, and Sicilian intervention. Despite such shortcomings, Istanbul controls a vast swath of territory in Africa, if only in name. Egypt, Tripolitania, Tunisia, Sudan, and Eritrea are all theoretically subject to the Turks. Of these, however, effective control is maintained only in Tripolitania, where it is quite laissez-faire to say the least. Egypt is under British military occupation, while the Sudan has been set up as an Anglo-Egyptian condominium. Tunisia is essentially a French vassal state/protectorate. Nobody really knows what is happening in Eritrea, other than that Ethiopia basically controls the entire region militarily; Asmara hasn't flown an Ottoman flag in decades.

#### **Country Analysis: Kingdom of the Netherlands**

The Netherlands is not very interested in Africa at the moment, being instead preoccupied with its colonial exploitation of the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). If a valuable slice of territory were to be left unclaimed, however, the Amsterdam could make a move.

#### **Country Analysis: Russian Empire**

Russia is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a country with interest in Africa. However, one enterprising Russian, Nikolay Ivanovitch Achinov, is personally preparing a secret expedition into French-ruled Djibouti at the time of the Berlin Conference. This expedition, however, will not arrive until 1889 and will be a dismal failure. Russia's main focus will be to limit the ambitions of the European empires in colonising the southern continent.

#### **Country Analysis: Austria-Hungary**

The Hapsburgs wish it were not such an inconvenient time for the most recent wave of colonisation to occur. Stricken with ethnic conflict and too weak to enforce order effectively within its own borders, the acquisition of Bosnia from the Ottoman Empire has been a bitter pill to swallow. If Austria-Hungary is granted a sphere of influence in Africa, it will almost certainly be in somewhere relatively worthless in regard to resources – perhaps Somalia.

### **Country Analysis: Sweden-Norway/Denmark**

The Scandinavian countries have been invited to Berlin as an olive branch of sorts. Denmark is still bitter from the amputation of Schleswig-Holstein by Prussia in 1864, but Bismarck wants to include all the relevant European states. Copenhagen will side with the French at almost every opportunity, but will not attempt to interfere in colonisation by the Great Powers in any way. Sweden is again experimenting with empire now that it grabbed Norway off the Danes, but it lacks both the will and the economic power to establish African colonies.

### **Special Rules:**

Procedure will be largely standard Model UN rules in the Berlin Conference simulation. However, certain changes will apply:

- Instead of resolutions, delegations will write *addendums*, which must be voted upon individually and added, one by one, to a document that will be known as the “Treaty of Berlin”.

- The **Treaty of Berlin** will be automatically passed at the end of council, provided that it does not contain contradictory actions. (This will be for the presiding officers to determine.) If contradictory terms are included, debate will be held at an earlier time to resolve them.
- Presiding officers will encourage unmoderated caucuses, which will be known as *private negotiation* for the purposes of the council.
- Moderated caucuses will be known as *public negotiation* for the purposes of this council, and will be limited to a ratio of 2:5 with private negotiation.
- Certain European empires will be provided with a map, listing primary, secondary, and tertiary goals for colonisation upon the day of the council.

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